12: Douglas T-3 (1951)1953 AJ4 W. Tibetans AJ4

horse to fetch her back. But if she returns the horse and does not come, that is the end of it. The divorce is final. The wife in a polyandric marriage, on the death of her eldest husband, can get a divorce from the younger brothers by tying a thread to the finger of the deceased and to her finger and then cutting the thread.

Though marriage is a concern of the lamas, divorce is purely a concern of the families.

This was the story of polyandry and of the *magpa* that I heard discussed along the trails and in the villages of Ladakh. But I wanted to see for myself how the institutions flourished and functioned.

I learned that the polyandry system breeds prostitution. There are in Ladakh about as many women as there are men. In Leh, which has a population of 4,000, the men and women are about equal in numbers. There are sixty prostitutes in Leh. They cater to the caravans and to the Army garrison.

I also learned that polyandry among Buddhists has increased the flow of Buddhist women into Moslem marriages. There is an ancient mosque in Leh serving the religious needs of Moslems who travel the caravan routes. Today about half the people of Leh are Moslems. Moslems are polygamous, in theory at least, and take as many wives as their economic conditions permit. In Ladakh that usually means that a Moslem has only one wife, for women are expensive there as elsewhere. Buddhist women, left out of a polyandric marriage and not choosing prostitution, turn to the Moslem men and take their Buddhist charms and good-luck pieces with them. To all outward appearances they become Moslems. The Moslem priest makes them wear a large piece of cloth under their hats and over their shoulders on threat that if they do not do so their hair will turn to snakes when they die. Buddhist women turning to Moslems for marriage, though outwardly Moslems, are probably Buddhists in their hearts for the rest of their

439 Yarkand. They had no roots in Leh. They wandered through the
178 empty bazaars, their light yellow skin almost white from sadness.
458 A depression had struck Leh. This was not a temporary depression. This was no seasonal or cyclical recession. The markets had not dried up owing to the natural causes that affect all markets. This was not demand and supply reacting in the classical way. Leh had reached the end of an era.

648 Russia had blocked the north and south trade routes that for
439 centuries had been important to both areas. From now on all the
458 commerce would move east and west. Russia would use the commerce of China and Tibet and Sinkiang to lace those three areas tightly into the Soviet Empire. If Tibetans needed sugar or barley, Russia would provide it. Russia would make their dependency on her an instrument for political control. Those who wanted barley in order to live would need be docile serfs in the Soviet scheme of things. The merchants of China, Sinkiang, and Tibet no longer would be free agents operating in an open market. The markets would be political instruments of Soviet imperialism. The candy merchants of Yarkand would now look to Russia for sugar cane. Russia would get her sugar cane by leverage on some other country and dispense it in Yarkand to the faithful. Those who did not toe the line would go without sugar.

The consequence of turning all the trade east and west is vast and incalculable. It is a part of Soviet empire building. It is part and parcel of the proselytizing of the Communist cause. The victims inside the Soviet Empire will perhaps never be known. Some of the victims outside the Soviet Empire can already be
468 seen. The bedraggled merchants of Leh face a dismal future.
438 There are no goods on the market. Scarcity has produced high prices. Real inflation has set in. Inflation has reached even to the lowly dzo that furnishes the motive power on the farm. The dzo now rents for four or five rupees a day, where one rupee used to
• 548 be ample. The prostitutes of Leh have revised their rates. For

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years they charged four annas (five cents); now their uniform rate is one rupee (twenty cents). [548]

Leh barely keeps alive. The demands of its native population bring some life to the markets. But Leh will shrink to a tiny village on that volume of trade. To date it has been saved by its Indian Army garrison, whose purchasing power keeps the ancient city alive. But once that artificial stimulant is removed, Leh will shrivel. There are projects for development of Ladakh. It is found, for example, that drug herbs grow well there and have an extraordinarily high alkaloid content. Kashmir is promoting the use of Ladakh for growing drug herbs on a commercial scale. Unless Kashmir undertakes a bold economic and social program in Ladakh, Leh will soon become as much a relic of the past as the gaunt and empty castle of the King that looks down on the old capital of Little Tibet.

The people of Leh do not seem to know the worries of which I speak. They have little; they expect no more; they are happy with their lot. They are friendly and cheerful, simple and uncomplicated. I stayed with them and came to know their simple faith. The deities of the passes, of the rivers, of the valleys are real to them. So are their fears and superstitions. They are gentle people, and poor beyond belief, held closely to their faith by stern lamas.

The beautiful women in Leh are the young ones in their teens or twenties. A woman, by the time she is thirty, has usually faded. She carries the work of the house, the weight of the children, the burden of the fields. By forty she is old, with no buoyancy left. But the young lady knows the gaiety of hope, the laughter of dreams. Such a girl was Zila. She wore a chic sheepskin over her shoulders, the fur side under. The fleece had been washed and combed and made to spray out along the edges of the garment and over her shoulders. These streamers of wool against Zila's dark dress, like her beautiful teeth against her dark lips, gave her a rare beauty.

I met Zila at the Moravian Mission at Leh, a mission estab-

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within him, certainly caused by jealousy of his other brothers for their relations with the common wife.

There are certain instances of extra-marital relations between people in this polyandrous community, but they are highly condemned and heavy sanctions are applied. In a *bagma* marriage, if the woman commits adultery, she is turned out of the house if she is childless, and the brothers choose another wife. If she is with child, she is fined and has to pay out of her personal property. As for the man, the co-respondent, he is beaten and/or has to pay compensation to the legal husbands. In a *magpa* marriage, where the woman is heir to the property, has the care of it and can marry as many men as she desires, infidelity of the wife is the only case in which the husbands can get a divorce. Otherwise, she can divorce them, but not *vice versa*. If the man is the adulterer in such a marriage, nothing is done except in the family where he has committed the adulterey. In the case of unmarried people, the woman is usually turned out of the house if she has premarital relations and should attempt to marry the man with whom she has had these relations. If the trespasser is a man, he is treated exactly like an adulterer in the usual *bagma* marriage.

Illegitimate children are usually hushed up. They are often adopted into some family or are sent to the monasteries as novices, so that nobody knows exactly what their origins are. As far as I could find out, there seems to be no prostitution in Tibet, and husbands suffering from the polyandrous organization do not have that outlet. Something, however, certainly is known about prostitution, for Tibetans, who never smoke, tell you that they do not do so because tobacco was a plant grown with the menstrual flow of a prostitute.

As far as I could find out, homo-sexuality is condemned, even in the monasteries, and certainly despised if practised, and I could not find any proof of it. But local Europeans who know the